



East Lake Sammamish Trail DEIS Review

Citizen Advisory Group (CAG) Recommendations

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Introduction

The East Lake Sammamish Trail Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) was convened in 1999 by King County to provide stakeholder input into the planning for East Lake Sammamish Trail—an 11-mile rail to trail project on the east side of Lake Sammamish. The CAG is comprised of homeowners adjacent to the trail, as well as representatives of various interests including environmental, bicycle, and other recreation groups.

During the first phase of the program (Interim Trail), the CAG provided input for the planning and development of the Interim Use Trail. The Interim Use Trail was completed and opened in March 2006.

The CAG was reconvened in October 2006 to provide input to the second phase of the project, which is the permanent Master Plan Trail. King County issued a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in October 2006, evaluating the potential impacts of five alternatives. The CAG was specifically asked to comment on design features of the alternatives and the impact evaluations and proposed mitigations disclosed in the Draft EIS. In addition, because it will be constructed in segments over at least 3 years, the County asked for the CAG's suggestions regarding priorities for developing the Master Plan Trail, as well as for public and CAG participation during the design and construction phase.

The CAG met over a series of three meetings to discuss these issues. In addition, several CAG members participated in the November 9, 2006 Public Hearing, at which 19 members of the public provided testimony about the Draft EIS.

The purpose of this report is to summarize the comments and recommendations offered by the CAG regarding the Master Plan Trail Draft EIS. Though a range of opinions were offered on each topic, the CAG was not expected to reach consensus. King County will use this document, as well as other public and agency comments submitted on the Draft EIS, to (1) confirm or change the preferred alternative, and (2) revise or add to the evaluations in the EIS, as needed. Many of the suggestions will also be carried forward to the design and construction phases of the project.

Recommendations

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

CAG members unanimously support locating the Master Plan Trail within the railbanked corridor. The differences in opinion were focused on trail surfacing, configuration, and operation, as stated below.

Those who support the Preferred Corridor Alternative, which would be wider than the existing Interim Use Trail and paved, gave the following reasons:

- Supports greater volumes of trail users
- Supports greater range of trail uses
- Separating bikes from pedestrian with a paved and soft surface may reduce the potential for conflicts
- Improve accessibility for handicapped users and hard tire bicycles

Those who support the continuation of the Interim Use Trail Alternative gave the following reasons:

- Concern about the cost of the Corridor Alternative, as well as the impacts of this alternative on adjacent property owners (see *Impacts* discussion below)
- Would prefer a gravel surface
- Concern about bicycle speeds accommodated by a paved trail due to safety considerations

Although the majority of the CAG members support the Preferred Corridor Alternative, they also expressed differing opinions regarding the configuration of the trail, as described under *Trail Design Elements* on Page 5.

TRAIL OPERATION

Hours of Operation

The Draft EIS states the trail will be open from dawn to dusk and there are no plans to illuminate the trail. The CAG suggests the trail should be treated as a transportation corridor. Since people continue to use trails such as the Burke-Gilman Trail and Sammamish River Trail at all hours, with no consequences, CAG members agree that the County needs to re-evaluate their policy, since it is not enforced. In addition the policy as applied to trails competes with the stated objective to provide non-motorized commuting alternatives.

The CAG recommends King County consider either extending the hours for the trail to 24-7 operations or to some longer period of time, for the following reasons:

- During the winter months in particular, this timeframe would close the trail to commuters.
- Keeping the trail open for commuters would improve trail safety.
- Closing the trail at dusk would be a problem for adjacent property owners because (1) the trail is used for access between neighbors, and (2) some property owners have to cross the trail to access the waterfront.
- The “dawn to dusk” rule is currently not being enforced on other King County trails, and it will likely not be enforced on the ELST.

Railbanked Corridor

Although the right-of-way issues pertains to corridor management and are outside the scope of the Master Plan Trail Draft EIS, the CAG offers the following comments for King County's consideration:

Use of the Railbanked Corridor

- More of the railbanked corridor (outside the trail footprint) should be available for public use; and
- Preserve adjacent permitted uses, some of which date back decades.

Preservation of the Railbanked Corridor

- The entire railbanked corridor should be preserved as a public right of way in perpetuity (Note: King County is not proposing any changes.).

TRAIL DESIGN ELEMENTS

The CAG discussed various aspects of the trail design that could improve safety and aesthetics, as well as minimize impacts on adjacent property owners.

Types of Trail Users/Trail Surfaces

CAG members unanimously agree that the trail should be available to as many types of users as possible.

Those who support a 12-foot wide paved trail with soft surface shoulders offered the following reasons:

- Supports greater volumes of trail users
- Supports greater range of trail uses
- Separating bikes from pedestrian with a paved and soft surface may reduce the potential for conflicts
- Improves accessibility for handicapped users and hard tire bicycles
- The trail should accommodate both thin and fat tire bikes as long as the speed issue is addressed .

Those who support a soft surface trail offer the following reasons:

- Paved trail alternatives are substantially more expensive;
- Bicyclists will travel at higher speeds on paved trails, creating potential safety concerns for other trail users and adjacent property owners;
- Paved trail is wider and thus has more potential for environmental impacts;
- A paved trail may not be as desirable for runners and some walkers.

Other suggestions include:

- Consider the characteristics of the trails to which the East Lake Sammamish Trail connects. If these connections are paved, then it may be more appropriate for this trail to be paved.
- Equestrian use should be restricted to the north end of the trail where it connects into other equestrian-friendly trails in Redmond.

Trail Width

The minimum section evaluated in the Draft EIS for the Preferred Corridor Alternative is 12 feet of pavement with two 2-foot shoulders, and two 1-foot clear zones, or a total of 18 feet. CAG Members had the following comments regarding the width of the trail:

- The majority of CAG members agreed that 12 feet should be the minimum width of the paved trail.
- There are places along the trail where the 18' width cannot be accommodated.
- The trail width should not be determined until other issues have been decided such as types of use, hours, etc., for example if both a paved and a separated soft-surface trail is provided, the pavement does not need to be 12' wide.

Intersection Signage

CAG members unanimously approved the planned signage, noting that in most cases, the signs need to emphasize that vehicles must yield the right of way. They further suggested that :

- In places where the trail intersects higher volume roads, the trail should be altered to direct people toward the cross-walks.

Fencing

CAG members acknowledged that some fencing will be appropriate and should be located on the boundary of the 30 foot wide "no build /management corridor", unless it needs to be closer to protect adjacent critical areas, and trail users from edge hazards.

They also offered the following comments:

- Where fencing is needed and where practical, the fencing should be located further from the trail to maximize the visual expanse of the ELST and minimize the intrusive aspects of fencing, wherever and whenever possible.
- Chain-link fencing immediately on both sides of the trail should be minimized, because it is unsightly and creates a "dog-run" effect that is a potential safety hazard to trail users.
- Alternatives to chain-link (e.g., split-rail fencing or using hedges maintained by property owners) should be considered that are more attractive and can better accommodate wildlife passage through the area.

Landings (*East Lake Sammamish Place in particular*)

- If the East A Alternative is adopted, the size of the landings and the vegetation used to preserve site distances should be revisited.
- Space needs to be preserved for utilities and services such as trash collection.

Restroom Signage

Install a sign along the trail directing users to the restroom at Inglewood. This restroom is not currently seen from the trail.

Amenities

King County, perhaps with the assistance of the three cities served by the trail, should :

- Install park benches, picnic tables, and other places where people can sit and rest, particularly seniors and physically challenged users
- Build additional access points; including beach access
- Design and install playground equipment and kid-friendly diversions; , including a possible play area by SE33rd.
- Provide more restrooms for users;
- Explore the concept of art installations or ELST-unique signage.
- Install lights at cross-walks for both user and resident safety.
- Install trash receptacles that are animal proof.

IMPACTS AND MITIGATION

The CAG members had the following comments regarding the adequacy of the impact evaluation and the proposed mitigation presented in the Draft EIS;

Identification of Specific Impacts

The Draft EIS is too general and does not adequately disclose the specific impacts to adjacent property owners. King County should be able to identify specific impacts, i.e. landscaping, irrigation system, or other property maintained features within the County right of way for each adjacent property owner so they can make appropriate plans about investments in their own property.

Fencing

The CAG suggests that not enough weight has been given to the impacts related to fencing and have the following comments:

- Fencing aesthetics should be a significant priority
- The potential for trail users to run into fencing (e.g., bicycle handle bars) if it is placed too close to the trail
- The need to provide adequate sight distance so that people can avoid collisions at trail crossings

Parking and Access

The CAG stresses that parking and access are significant issues and offer the following comments:

- More access points are needed for those who live close enough to walk or bike to the trail.
- Parking is also needed at intervals along the corridor. The CAG recommends that signs clearly identify where parking is allowed and by whom, and that these parking regulations be aggressively enforced.

- The Draft EIS does not adequately identify the loss of neighborhood parking within the railbanked right of way, resulting from a wider trail. If this parking is reduced, visitors in particular could be forced to parallel park along East Lake Sammamish Parkway, introducing other safety concerns such as reduced line of sight for vehicles pulling out on the road.
- King County should explore a potential partnership with the City of Sammamish to develop parking at the waterfront park site proposed by the City of Sammamish at the north end of the corridor. The city's plan includes restrooms in this area.
- During trail construction, it is likely that more access points will be needed than proposed for the permanent trail operation. When the construction access points are negotiated, consideration should be given to make the access permanent (i.e., extended to trail operation), or providing other amenities such as parks or benches at these locations.
- Provide additional information about how dirty water from the wheel washing during construction will be managed.

Trail Maintenance

Design and maintain trash receptacles and doggy litter bags to prevent tampering, littering, or equipment malfunction.

Culvert Mitigation

Provide additional information on the number and location of boxed culverts, which would replace existing culverts to allow fish passage.

State Route 520 Crossing

The CAG notes that a trail overcrossing, previously contemplated by WSDOT at the SR 520 off-ramp, is still being supported by the City of Redmond and others because it would be safer than the at-grade crossing at the Redmond Way signal, as shown in the Draft EIS.

IMPLEMENTATION

Chapter 2 of the Draft EIS describes that design and construction of the Master Plan Trail would likely occur over a period of years. Not much detail beyond that, however, has been developed to date. The CAG was asked what they thought the priorities should be for phased implementation, as well as how the public and the CAG should participate in the implementation process.

Prioritization of trail development

Ideas and suggestions ranged as follows:

- Phasing should begin at the north end from Redmond to Inglewood because the demand is greatest there.
- It would be better to begin at the south end because of the lack of access points and facilities in other areas.
- It would be better to determine usage first and use that to determine the phasing.
- It would be logical to start work at both (i.e., north and south) ends of the trail. As demonstrated on the construction of the interim trail, there are lessons to be learned on the “easier” segments before tackling the more difficult central segment.
- Parking and restrooms should be constructed first to alleviate concerns about current interim trail use and future master plan trail use.
- There was discussion about the County's property at the base of Inglewood Hill Road and the need to develop that as parking/trailhead/restroom area first.

Interjurisdictional Coordination

The CAG emphasizes that local jurisdictions need to be involved in an early and ongoing basis to assure that trail development is coordinated with their future

planning. For example, the City of Sammamish is currently considering other transportation improvements that are relevant to trail access (e.g., the signalization of Louis Thompson Road at East Lake Sammamish Parkway). This needs to be taken into account during trail development.

Public Involvement

The CAG believes it is essential that careful public involvement be undertaken during each phase and for each segment of the Master Planned Trail and have the following recommendations;

- The public be notified well in advance of any public meetings and special attention should be given to reaching out to those people who are directly impacted by trail design and construction.
- The County should be prepared to answer questions posed by the community, otherwise the meetings are not useful.
- King County should plan to conduct frequent meetings with smaller community groups.

CAG Involvement

The CAG has served as a sounding board for the community because it includes diverse interests. CAG members suggest that during the design phase they could focus on priorities and criteria, if more input is needed. CAG members would like more information earlier and more certainty about the status of the project so they can be better informed to communicate what is going on with their neighbors and the community.